

DATE: February 16, 2017

TO: Appropriations (Conservation and Development)

FROM: Scott K. Wilderman, President/CEO Career Resources, Inc.

SUBJECT: STRIVE Testimony (Labor Budget)

Good evening, members of the appropriations committee. My name is Scott Wilderman, and I am the CEO of Career Resources, Inc. and I am here this evening to ask that you please consider reinstating funding for the STRIVE program in the Department of Labor budget. For over a decade my agency has operated STRIVE throughout Connecticut, with programs currently in Hartford, Bridgeport, and New Haven and soon to be in Waterbury. We utilize a proven employment model that helps men and women permanently lift themselves and their families out of poverty through intensive attitudinal and skills training programs that lead to sustained, living wage employment.

STRIVE is not a light touch – we work to permanently remediate the underlying causes preventing a person from getting and retaining employment and advancing in a career, and we expect participants to commit to making lasting change in their lives. Through our services, STRIVE addresses the specific barriers faced by our clients, which might include a lack of skills, education and work history, a criminal record, systemic disconnection from work and school, and long-term dependence on public assistance.

In our 14 years of operating STRIVE here in Connecticut we have brought economic self-sufficiency, dignity and a brighter future to hundreds of individuals and their families. For the past six years, the State of Connecticut has been the primary source of revenue for STRIVE, currently funding the program at a level of \$200,000 per year. More importantly we leverage the state funds with two federal programs for justice involved youth in Hartford and New Haven. The elimination of these funds will put the federal programs in jeopardy of being eliminated as well. With the state investment, each year an average of 75 clients complete the program and approximately sixty are placed into employment. These sixty clients tend to work full time, earning \$1.5 million collectively in income and paying \$225,000 in taxes. While the program pays for itself just in tax revenue, these clients also represent a significant savings to the state in lower public assistance spending and a reduction in the recidivism rate for ex-offenders. Funding STRIVE is a fiscally responsible decision.

In STRIVE, we teach our clients that the past does not define who you are today or more importantly what you will become tomorrow. We are all responsible for choosing our own paths forward. You will hear stories this evening from several STRIVE graduates who have not given up. Despite many setbacks and challenges in their lives, at STRIVE they were able to find their voice and make the decision to invest in themselves. I sit before you today asking the State of Connecticut to continue to invest in them, as well. Please help us continue this work by restoring the DOL STRIVE funds and becoming part of the solution for those seeking a chance at redemption and the American Dream.

In closing, I know that we are all facing an unprecedented budget crisis and that sacrifices need to be made. I understand that it's unreasonable to expect the same level of funding as previous years. Nevertheless, I ask that you please continue to support STRIVE even at a reduced level. We are committed to maintaining high service levels and will continue to seek supplemental private funding, as we have always done, but the partnership of the state is essential as we pursue that support. Thank you for your time and your support in helping us Keep STRIVE Alive!

Respectfully,

Scott K. Wilderman
President/CEO
Career Resources, Inc.